

## **A Sermon Preached after the Euro Referendum**

### **St Mary's, Warwick – Trinity 4**

*The whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit ... the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5: 14-15, 22-23a)*

On Thursday evening, into Friday morning I witnessed the Referendum count for our district. I went because I'd been invited and because it felt like a potentially historic moment. I was impressed by the diligence and organization of the process, and felt proud of our democracy. When I left, there was a pile of Leave ballots and a significantly larger pile of Remain votes and the BBC website had Remain in the lead for the first time in some hours. I went home to sleep and awoke like most of us, I guess, to a result we'd not expected and the surprise resignation of the Prime Minister.

Inevitably, a great deal's been written about these dramatic developments. One of the better pieces is by Steven Croft – presently Bishop of Sheffield, soon to be Bishop of Oxford. He notes that three vital questions came into focus during the referendum campaign and the result has not resolved them.

The first is global migration. He says: 'We heard again and again "immigration" was an issue. But for the most part, the campaign was framed in the language of the 70's and 80's.' And he believes that: 'The issue for 2016 is not simply immigration but global migration. We're living through and will live through the greatest migration of people in human history. This movement of peoples is likely to increase through the effects of climate change, population growth, global inequality and armed conflict.' Thus he concludes: 'We need a comprehensive, deep conversation about how Britain and the world will respond.'

His second question is identity, and: 'What does it mean to be British in 2016?' The Bishop says: 'We need leaders of vision able to articulate an inspiring vision for Britain and its future. That positive vision did not emerge in the campaign from either side.'

And the third issue is politics itself. Croft states: 'The murder of Jo Cox MP was an immense tragedy. The response of politicians on all sides helped us see again how many good, honest people represent us in Parliament.' Consequently, he argues: 'We need a style of public discourse which is more honest, more humble, more gentle and more kind.' And he asks: 'Over the next ten years, the House of Parliament is to be refurbished. Will we have the courage, I wonder, to reshape the chamber of the House of Commons to be less adversarial, less binary, more collaborative, seeking wisdom from every part of the community?' <http://www.sheffield.anglican.org/blog/bishop-of-sheffield/the-referendum-result-a-reflection>

Those are important questions for our society but what about the church? The day after the referendum result the Archbishops of Canterbury and York issued a joint statement. In it they said: 'As citizens of the United Kingdom, whatever our views during the referendum campaign, we must now unite in a common task to build a generous and forward looking country, contributing to human flourishing around the world. We must remain hospitable and compassionate, builders of bridges and not barriers. Many of those

living among us and alongside us as neighbours, friends and work colleagues come from overseas and some will feel a deep sense of insecurity. We must respond by offering reassurance, by cherishing our wonderfully diverse society, and by affirming the unique contribution of each and every one.'

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5743/eu-referendum-statement-by-archbishops-of-canterbury-and-york>

That's a powerful and hopeful vision to hold onto as we attempt to go forward from where we are. And we find a road map for that journey in our first reading this morning. It's likely that the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians was a circular epistle sent to a group of churches near modern day Ankara in Turkey. Those churches were riven by conflict. It's thought that they were originally established through Paul's ministry and then other Christians arrived teaching a different version of the faith, although it's difficult to pin down the exact circumstances.

Nevertheless, it's clear that out of this divergence there was a great deal of disagreement and discord. It's not unlike the situation in which we find ourselves today – a **dis**-united kingdom split in half over what's best for us – and it's into such a situation that Paul writes: *The whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit ... the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

Those are words for the Church and our world in 2016 as much as they were when they were first written around AD 50.

The statement by our Archbishops goes onto say: 'The referendum campaign has been vigorous and at times has caused hurt to those on one side or the other. We must therefore act with humility and courage – being true to the principles that make the very best of our nation. Unity, hope and generosity will enable us to overcome the period of transition that will now happen, and to emerge confident and successful. The opportunities and challenges that face us as a nation and as global citizens are too significant for us to settle for less.'

Now clearly isn't an *easy* time for this nation. Many people are perplexed, frustrated or angry whilst others are celebrating. There are serious matters to be addressed. In addition to those identified by Steven Croft, there's also the challenge of what a *Financial Times*' leader on the day after the referendum called: living 'in a post-factual democracy' – when facts met myths (it said) they were as useless as bullets bouncing off the bodies of aliens in a H G Wells novel (*FT* 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016).

But this time of year is when the Church of England ordains new deacons and priests. It's a time when we focus on individual vocation to ministry but – as we face the future together – it's important to hold fast to our **shared** vocation as a church. The Church was brought into being by the Spirit. We're people of the Spirit, so we're called to live by the Spirit and bear the fruits of the Spirit. Our Church, our nation and our world need those fruit now more than ever.

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26<sup>th</sup> June 2016*